The Stamps of Canada, Chapter V, Part 1

Based on a Mekeel's Weekly Publication by B. W. H. Poole, with images added

Chapter V—The Perforated Pence Stamps

In the Report of the Postmaster-General for September 30th, 1857, to which we have already made reference, we read:—

Moreover, the Department has been led, by the increasing use of Postage Stamps, to take measures for obtaining the Canadian Postage Stamps in sheets perforated in the dividing lines, in the manner adopted in England, to facilitate the separation of a single stamp from the others on a sheet when required for use.

Left to right: 1858 1/2p rose perforated, Sc. 11; 1858 3p red perforated (Sc. 12); 1859 6p brown violet perforated (Sc. 13)

From the above statement, one would naturally infer that such a useful innovation would be adopted at once, especially so when it is considered that the utility and convenience of perforation had already been amply tested and had proved eminently satisfactory in England. Unfortunately, no further mention of perforation is made in the Reports of succeeding years, and this absence of direct official evidence combined with the existence of certain facts has given rise to much theorising as to the actual date of issue of the perforated varieties, and as to whether the perforation was applied by the manufacturers of the stamps, by the Canadian Government, or by private parties in Canada.

Mr. Donald A. King in his article in the Monthly Journal says:—

It is an open question whether these stamps were delivered to the Canadian Post Office Department in a perforated condition or not. The manufacturers are wholly unable to throw any light on the subject; and while there is much to be said in favor of their having perforated the stamps, there are points against it almost as strong.

In favor of it there is the fact that, at the date that these stamps were issued, it was more than probable that a firm like the manufacturers would have perforating machines. The normal gauge of the perforated set is 12, that being the only size ever used by the manufacturers, or their successors, the American Bank Note Company; indeed, they call 12 their standard and only gauge.

On the other hand, we find that there are perforated stamps of the first series issued, viz., the 6d on laid paper; also, that there exist two different varieties of perforation that were never used by the makers, viz., one gauging 14, and another that is described in the American Journal of Philately for January, 1891, as follows:—

"CANADA.—In a large lot of pence issues, purchased by us lately, we have found two copies of the 3d. on greyish wove paper, perforated 13, with oblique parallel cuts. This seems to confirm the theory that the pence issues of Canada were not perforated by the manufacturers, but either by the Canadian Government, or by some persons authorized by them, who most likely experimented with different perforating machines, finally selecting the one perforating 12."

Considering these facts, it may be that the stamps were sent to Canada in an imperforate condition, and that the Post Office Department had them perforated there, either buying a perforating machine, or entrusting them to some manufacturers of stationery. Perforations gauging 13 and 14 may have been experimental, as specimens of these varieties are rare; perforation 12 being adopted as giving the best results, the other sizes not being at all clearly cut, as the 12 generally is. All the stock of 1/2d, 3d and 6d on hand would, in this case, have been perforated, which might account for the copy of the 6d on laid paper that is known in this condition. There always remains the query why the 7-1/2d and 10d were not treated in the same manner, and to this no answer can be given. Probably the safest theory to advance, and the one that I think is correct, is that the 12 gauge was the official one used by the manufacturers, and that the 13 and 14 were the result of private enterprise by people using large quantities of stamps, and they may possibly antedate the regularly perforated issue. This point can only be settled by copies being found on the original covers.

In commenting on the above it will save undue confusion if we state that the copy of the perforated 6d on laid paper to which Mr. King refers was proved to be a forgery as shown by the following extract from the American Journal of Philately for 1891:—

There is no longer any mystery in regard to the origin of that great rarity! the perforated 6 pence on laid paper, these stamps having been perforated for four or five years in the shop of Messrs. Benjamin, Sarpy & Co., Cullum street, London, who openly boast of having manufactured and sold those in the collection of the late Hon. T. K. Tapling and other prominent collectors.

With regard to the varieties perforated 13 and 14—while these are undoubtedly rare, all the evidence strongly points to the fact that they are unofficial varieties, a statement, we believe, which has never been seriously combated by students of the early Canadian stamps.

To Be Continued

The Stamps of Canada, Chapter V, Part 2

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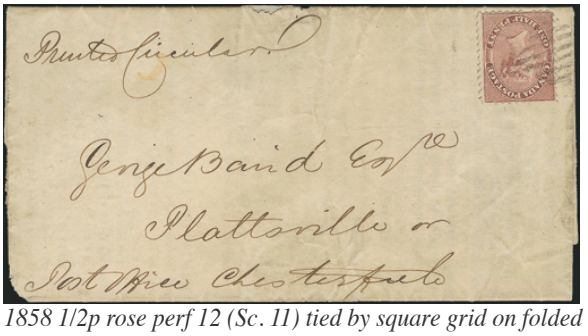
Canada 1852 Beaver 3p red with Kingston experimental perforations (Sc. 4 variety), horizontal pair, scissor separated, tied by two strikes of four-ring "18" cancels on blue folded cover from the Ontario Foundry Co. to New York, the cover also with reddish "Kingston U.C., MY 30" c.d.s. and "Canada" arc exchange office handstamp. One of only two or three recorded covers with the Kingston Trial perforations. All known covers bearing stamps with the Kingston trial perforations originate from the Ontario Foundry Co. where the experimental perforating machine was manufactured.

Thus, most of the "contrary" evidence adduced by Mr. King [that other than the experimental Kingston perfs, the stamps were perforated by someone other than the manufacturer] carries no weight with it at all. The most interesting point he raises is the fact that, though the 7-1/2d and 10d denominations were current at the same time as the 1/2d, 3d and 6d, these values were not perforated. So far as the 10d is concerned this seems all the more strange when it is considered that one supply of this value was certainly printed after September, 1857, the date of the Report mentioning the adoption of perforation.

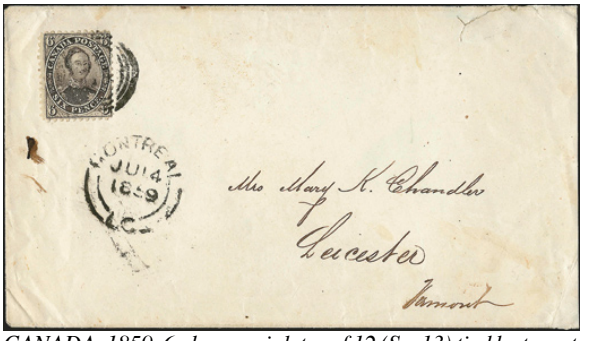
Canada 1852 Beaver 3p brown red, "Kingston" experimental perforattion (Sc. 4 variety)

Mr. Howes has made diligent search through official records and carefully scanned itemised reports of more or less petty expenditures, and he was unable to find any reference whatsoever to a disbursement such as would have been necessary had the Government purchased a perforating machine or had the stamps perforated by some private concern. It is, therefore, unquestionable that the natural course—i.e., that the manufacturers should perforate the stamps—was the one followed.



1858 1/2p rose perf 12 (Sc. 11) tied by square grid on folded printed circular datelined "Toronto, June 28th, 1859", to "Plattsivlle or Chesterfield". A late usage of this stamp as it was replaced by the decimal issue on July 1.

1859 3p red (Sc. 12) tied by neat target cancel on small cover to Canboro, C.W. [Canada West], postmarked with a "Cayuca, U.C. [Upper Canada], 1859, Jy 26" split-ring c.d.s.



CANADA, 1859, 6p brown violet perf 12 (Sc. 13) tied by target "Montreal JU 14, 1859" double-circle datestamp paying the single cross-border rate on a cover to Vermont

The real root cause of all the problems surrounding these perforated stamps seems to lie in the general acceptance of the assumption that they were issued in 1857 or early in 1858—an assumption that appears to be entirely devoid of the support of tangible facts when the matter is scrutinised thoroughly. Mr. Howes has delved into the subject with his usual thoroughness and his deductions are so well founded that we imagine no unbiased student will venture to do other than agree that his findings are fully borne out by the history of the stamps so far as we know it. We, therefore, make no apology for reproducing his arguments in full:—

The date usually assigned to the appearance of the perforated stamps is January, 1858. The London Society gave simply "1857," which is apparently set down merely because they have just quoted the announcement from the Postmaster General's Report for that year. Evans and Moens, in their catalogues, both name the date as November, 1858. Unfortunately, no more authoritative statement has been found, except that in Messrs. Corwin and King's article they say "Mr. Hooper positively states that it took place in January, 1858." Mr. John R. Hooper was at that time (1890) connected with the Canadian Post Office Department at Ottawa and took pains to look up much information for the above-mentioned gentlemen. His reasons for the "positive statement" are not given, and inasmuch as he is quoted elsewhere as saying that "the records of the Post Office Department are silent as to where this perforation was performed and by whom," and also seems a little uncertain in some other details, we feel that further confirmation is needed.

We have given the supplies received after the 30th September, 1857, and deducted the remainders so as to have the actual number issued. The 10d has already proved a stumbling block, for it was not perforated at all! Next we find the 6d to the number of 150,000, when the total issue, including the laid paper, was but 400,000; yet the catalogue value of the imperforates is some $6 for each variety, and of the perforated stamp at least $30! Can anyone doubt that all these 150,000 6d stamps were not perforated? In the case of the 3d we have one and a third millions to compare with a total issue of three and a half millions—about a third in the supposed perforated class. Yet the catalogue value of the latter is $2.50 against 36 cents for the wove paper imperforate alone. With the 1/2d stamp there are two millions against a total of three and a third millions, or about two to one in favor of the supposed perforated stamps, yet the latter are double the catalogue price of the former! The only conclusion to be drawn from these regularly appearing inconsistencies in each value is that all the supplies after 30th September, 1857, were not perforated, as the 10d stamp very glaringly intimates!

If this be so, is it not possible that the order to perforate the new supplies was given to the manufacturers much later than has hitherto been thought to be the case? It hardly seems likely that this improvement would be ordered for a few supplies and then dropped, only to re-appear a year and a half later as a permanent feature of the new set. Once adopted it was more than likely to be retained.

Let us see, then, just for curiosity's sake, what the supplies of the last six months of issue yield us for data. For the 1/2d we find 850,000 roughly, with 60,000 remainders. Call it 800,000 issued which, if perforated, would be a quarter of the total issue of 1/2d stamps, or a ratio to the imperforates of one to three. This is not so far away from the catalogue ratio of two to one (inversely, of course) in the value of the perforated stamps. With the 3d stamp we have 450,000 roughly, with 20,000 remainders, say 430,000 issued. Of a total issue of 3,500,000 this represents one-eighth, or a ratio of one to seven. The inverse ratio of seven to one for catalogue value comes pretty close when we compare $2.50 with 36 cents! In the case of the 6d there are 70,000, less 17,500 remainders, or 52,500. This is approximately one-eighth the total issue of 400,000, or again a ratio of one in seven. The inverse ratio of seven to one for a catalogue value would make the perforated stamp list $42 with the imperforate at $6. But both laid and wove paper 6d stamps list at approximately $6, whereas, if all had been issued on but one variety of paper, we might find, perhaps, a single list price of, say $4. With this as a basis, the catalogue value of $30 for the perforated 6d is in as close agreement with our supposition as are the others. And, best of all, the second supply of the 10d stamp is disposed of without any difficulty whatever under this hypothesis!

It may be argued that reasoning thus from catalogue prices is too uncertain to prove of value. Granted in many cases. But here is an issue from fifty to sixty years old; the stamps were regularly used in increasing numbers during their years of issue; they have always been popular and eagerly collected, so that the stock in existence has been pretty well handled and pretty well distributed. Under these conditions the catalogue prices should by this time reflect fairly accurately the relative rarity of the main varieties of each stamp at least; and it is this relative rarity that we are after in order to approximate the original supplies of the main varieties. The result is certainly of more than mere interest, the agreement being such that we are tempted to lay down the following propositions in regard to the perforated stamps for further proof or disproof:—

First. The regular perforation (gauge 12) was done by the manufacturers and applied to the last requisitions previous to the change to decimal stamps.

Second. The date of the supposed issue of the perforated stamps should be changed from January, 1858, to November, 1858, or January, 1859.

Third. The quantities of perforated stamps issued are placed approximately at:—1/2d, 789,440; 3d, 428,200; 6d. 52,422. In further support of the above postulates, we must say that every cover bearing any one of the three perforated stamps which we have been able to get a satisfactory date from has been postmarked in 1859! Not one has yet been seen which bore a date in 1858 even, and one 6d from the Seybold collection, which was dated at Brantford, December 29, 1857, turned out to be bad. Of course, perforated stamps are hard to find on original covers, but it is curious that so far not one has to rebut the theory we have laid down.

These three perforated stamps do not provide much variation in the quality of the paper. Most of the stamps are found on a hard wove paper, varying slightly in thickness, and though the 1/2d and 3d are listed on ribbed paper, we venture to doubt that this is a true ribbed paper for the reasons set forth in our last chapter.

Mr. King records the 6d bisected diagonally and the halves used as 3d stamps, but, as in the case of the similar variety in the imperforate issues, there could have been no real need for such bi-section.

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